

California Game Warden: What it takes to make the grade

It is 6 a.m. on a morning late in January. Daylight is still lurking beneath the horizon. The air is crisp and damp. The hallway appears dark and quiet. The classroom is empty, except for row after row of

By Lt. Sherry
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meticulously aligned tables and chairs.

Neatly stacked at each position is a large collection of manuals, handbooks, code books, and numerous administrative forms.

At 6:30 a.m. the serenity shatters in building 1000B of the Criminal Justice Training Center, located at Napa Valley College. Newly hired cadets and students, who have enrolled themselves in the academy in hopes of getting hired, begin to flood the hallway and classroom of the only training center for California Fish and Game wardens.

Each face casts a different expression. It may be fear, anxiety, or excitement of finally getting closer to achieving a life-long goal. Each cadet has a different set of life experiences on which to draw. These experiences will often dictate the degree of success or difficulty that a new warden cadet will endure during the remaining 28 weeks, or 1,149 hours of training.

At 7:30 a.m., as the cadets wait anxiously in their seats, the academy drill instructor briskly storms into the classroom, and the world as



The academy fosters an atmosphere that allows the cadets to focus their energy on meeting the high academic standards, as well as mastering the many skills that are required for California peace officer certification.



DFG photos by Robert Waldron and Matt Elyash

Game warden cadets receive training not only as a peace officer, but in fish, wildlife and habitat issues as well. Advanced training is required as they continue their careers.

they once knew it changes forever. This is referred to as the cadet "wake-up call." The cadets are commanded to the position of attention. Some cadets bring prior military experience to the academy, lessening the shock of a paramilitary format. However, many of today's cadets are less likely to have such experience. The overall environment fostered within the academy is considered to be moderate stress with a high degree of discipline. This

allows the cadets to focus their energy on meeting the high academic standards, as well as mastering the many skills that are required for certification as a peace officer in the State of California.

The intensity of the first day continues as the cadets are bombarded with directives, instructions, and commands that will dictate how they conduct themselves for the duration of the academy.

Each cadet becomes responsible for the mountain of manuals and their contents sitting on the desk before them.

Drill and ceremony is an important aspect of each day in the academy.

As such, the cadets are ordered outside to the parade deck where they line up in their first squad formation. The sun has burned off the Napa fog, and the next several hours are spent practicing drills that will become almost second nature.

High noon, the cadets are released for an hour lunch break. At 1 p.m., they return. Safety equipment which includes a gun belt, holster, red training gun, handcuffs, baton ring, and inert pepper spray are issued to each cadet. In addition, they receive a workbook for nearly each of the 42 learning domains (instructional topics) in which they are required to show proficiency. Their equipment bags can hardly contain it all.

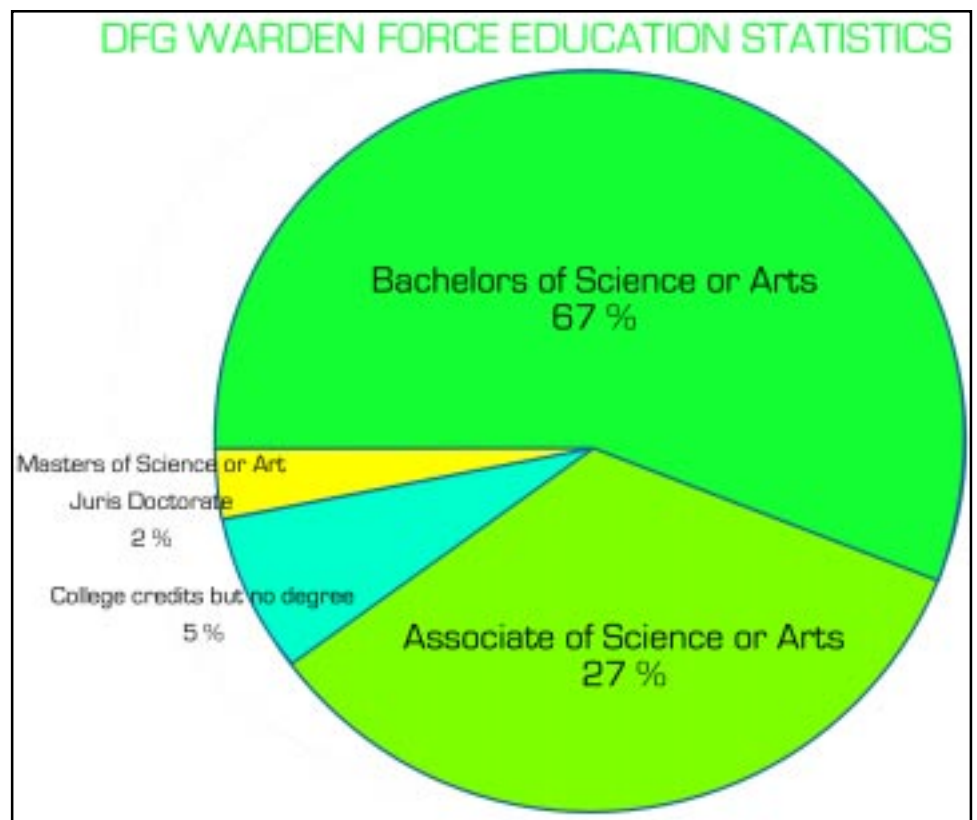
The last bit of daylight fades into the horizon and the cadets are dismissed for the first time. As they depart the classroom, weighted heavily with the day's information, manuals, and equipment, the facial expressions now reveal a sense of being overwhelmed, confused, eager and still anxious.

They rush from the classroom to get home to allow ample time to prepare for the next day. Little do they know that the first day has set the stage for the next six months of constant training, testing, and evaluation.

DFG Academy History and Training

Department of Fish and Game (DFG) wardens have statewide authority as peace officers with the primary duties of enforcing the Fish and Game Code and the orders, rules, and regulations of the Fish and Game Commission. As peace officers, each warden must be certified in the same law enforcement topics as any other law enforcement officer. Prior to 1988, all newly hired Fish and Game wardens were sent to basic police academies throughout California. Although, this method of training worked, the need to train wardens in the more specialized aspects of the position was managed inconsistently throughout the states.

The Resources Academy (now the Fish and Game Academy), was created in 1988. To date, there have been 12 graduating classes. The Fish and Game Academy is certified by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards in Training. The curriculum includes criminal law, ethics, communication, search and seizure, report writing, investigations, patrol procedures, driving, physical fitness, defensive tactics, baton, firearms, first aid/CPR, cultural diversity, Spanish, and



DFG photo by Robert Waldron

The cadets receive a "wake-up call" as they are commanded to the position of attention. The academy uses a para-military style discipline.

community relations.

In addition, a cadet attending the Fish and Game Academy can also expect to receive training in the enforcement of the Fish and Game Code, DFG history and orientation, hunter education, animal welfare, pollution investigation,

streambed alterations, and environmental crime recognition. Training includes the use of wildlife decoys, wildlife identification, marine and inland fish identification, restricted species enforcement, commercial fishing regulations and gear requirements, public

safety wildlife issues, field care of game and evidence, hazardous materials response, use of map and compass, global positioning system, small boat handling, and both the federal and California Endangered Species Act.

Upon successful completion of the academy, the new game warden enters a 10 week field training program. The trainee is assigned to work with three different field training officers (FTO) in a variety of locations.

This gives the trainee an opportunity to develop and refine the skills learned in the academy. This also allows the DFG to evaluate the trainee's ability to function as a solo warden at the conclusion of the program. Once the FTO program is complete, the new warden reports to a permanently assigned area, but will be eligible for transfer after three years in their first assignment.

Training is an integral part of a warden's regime, as they are required to show proficiency in weaponless defense, baton, and firearms on a quarterly basis. Also, each warden must attend 24 hours of continued professional officer training every other year.

There are more than 409 game wardens and warden supervisors in California protecting the thousands of square miles of habitat. Game wardens have the authority to enforce all California laws, but they specialize in laws governing the use, take and impact of humans upon the natural resources.

The training is rigorous, the work demanding, the pay less than that of other law enforcement officers around the state. Yet wardens will say the work is rewarding, because they are the guardians of the rich diversity of fish, wildlife and habitat that is California's wild heritage.

Lt. Sherry Howell is assistant coordinator at the DFG's Fish and Game Warden Academy



DFG file photo by Robert Waldron

Training is an integral part of a warden's regime. Cadets must show proficiency in weaponless defense, baton, and firearms on a quarterly basis. After complete cadet training and field training, wardens must maintain their skills with continued professional officer training (24 hours every other year).



Application and Selection Process

Candidates meeting the minimum exam requirement must complete a standard State Examination Application (STD 678) and mail or deliver it to the California Department of Fish and Game, Attention Exam Unit, 1416 Ninth Street, Room 1217, P.O. Box 944209, Sacramento, CA 94244-2090. The applications are evaluated and applicants who possess the minimum qualifications are sent a Supplemental Application. This provides candidates with an opportunity to document their level of experience, skills, and abilities. The remaining requirements are tested in the hiring phase.

Those candidates in this process will be subject to a physical agility test, background investigation (including a criminal history check & polygraph), medical and psychological examination, and a POST English comprehension exam.

For more information regarding a career as a California Fish and Game warden contact one of the offices of the Department of Fish and Game. For Fish and Game Academy information, contact Lt. Mike Carion (707) 253-3287, Lt. Sherry Howell (707) 253-3391, or visit the DFG website at: www.dfg.ca.gov.

Get the details on becoming a California Game Warden

Requirements for warden cadet exam

(To obtain a State of California civil service position you must take and pass an examination.)

- High school diploma or GED, and the equivalent to completion of two years (60 semester units) of college with 18 semester units in the biological sciences, police science or law enforcement, natural resources conservation, ecology or related fields. (Students who have 30 semester units of college, and have 18 semester units completed in the required or related fields, will be admitted to the examination, but must produce evidence of completion of 60 semester units before they can be considered eligible for appointment.)
- Applicants with any prior felony convictions will automatically be disqualified.
- Minimum age requirement -18 years of age.

Hiring requirements

- **Driver's license:** Possession of a valid California driver's license of the appropriate class (Class C) prior to appointment.
- **Additional Desirable Qualifications:** Ability to use word processing software on personal computers; ability to make minor vehicle repairs when service is not available; ability to safely operate fish and game vessels.
- **Special Personal Characteristics:** Willingness to work unusual hours and on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays; willingness to live and work throughout the State; satisfactory record as a law-abiding citizen; neat personal appearance; tact; reliability; keen observation skills; interest in and aptitude for fish and wildlife conservation and law enforcement work.
- **Special Physical Requirements:** Sound physical condition, ability to swim, and hearing adequate to perform the duties of the position.
- **Vision:** Visual acuity of not less than 20/40 in each eye without correction and corrected to not less than 20/20 in each eye; normal color vision as measured by the Ishihara Pseudoisochromatic Plate Test or for persons failing the Ishihara, the Farnsworth D-15 Arrangement Test; a peripheral field of view of at least 120 degrees of horizontal extent and 100 degrees of vertical extent, with no evidence of scotomas (nonseeing areas) within the full visual field of each eye.
- **Citizenship Requirement:** You must be either a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident alien who is eligible for and has applied for U.S. citizenship.
- **Background Investigation Information:** You will be required to complete a personal history statement where you will be required to divulge information related to any driving violations, arrests and/or convictions. A thorough investigation will be conducted into each successful candidate's background to determine if he/she meets the following POST job dimensions for peace officers in California:

Communication Skills; Learning Ability; Observational Skills; Interest in People; Desire for Self-Improvement; Dependability; Operation of a Motor Vehicle; Problem-Solving Ability; Judgment Under Pressure; Appearance; Willingness to Confront Problems; Interpersonal Sensitivity; Physical Ability; Integrity; Credibility as a Witness in Court.

Fingerprints and polygraph: You will be required to be fingerprinted. The prints will be submitted to the California Department of Justice and the FBI to check for criminal history. Also a polygraph examination is used to verify the information submitted by each applicant during the examination process.
- **Drug Testing Requirement:** You will be required to pass a drug screening test.
- **Psychological Screening - Pass/Fail:** You will be required to take and pass a psychological evaluation. The evaluation will measure maturity levels, impulse control and suitability for work as a Fish and Game warden.
- **Medical and Physical Performance Test - Pass/Fail:** You will be required to take and successfully complete a medical examination, a visual acuity and color vision test, and a physical performance test that measures strength and endurance.
- **Ability to Communicate Effectively and Write Clearly and Concisely:** You will be required to take and pass a test demonstrating your reading comprehension, vocabulary and English skills, including punctuation, grammar and spelling, equivalent to the 12th grade level of proficiency.



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Apply NOW for the OPEN

Fish and Game Warden Cadet examination!

Qualifications for entrance to exam:

18 years of age & 60 semester units (2 years) college, 18 semester units of which must be in Biology, Police Science or Law Enforcement, Natural Resource Conservation, or a related field. *(You can take the exam if you've completed the 18 required units and have a total of 30 units, but must have 60 units to be appointed.)*

For more information, call (916) 653-8120 or check out our web site at: www.dfg.ca.gov

Send your application to: Department of Fish & Game, Attention: Exam Unit, 1416 9th Street, Room 1217, P.O. Box 944209, Sacramento, CA 94244-2090.

State Applications (form 678) available at all EDD or Fish and Game offices or off the web at www.spb.ca.gov. Applications accepted through Feb. 16, 2001.